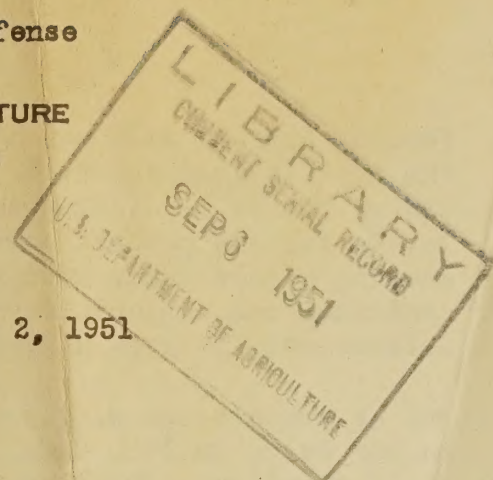


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CO-OP CHAT: Rural Electric Co-ops and National Defense

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
RURAL ELECTRIFICATION ADMINISTRATION
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.



July 2, 1951

To All REA Co-op Officials:

As I see the world situation, I am convinced that, while hoping for the best, we had better be prepared for the worst if we want our democratic way of life to survive. Even the best we can hope for will be an armed truce for years to come, which may at any time flare into all-out war. This means that we must produce more efficiently to meet our current defense needs and to build up stockpiles for emergencies. But it also means that we must increase our production capacity in all essential fields as rapidly and as fully as possible while we still have time and resources to do so. If all-out war should be forced on us, our salvation will depend in large measure on how well we have developed our production capacity by then.

Rural electric co-ops, in my opinion, have a unique opportunity in this present situation to demonstrate to the Nation and to the world what the voluntary cooperation of free men can accomplish.

You co-op leaders can justly be proud of the rural electrification job done so far. We have made much greater progress than even the most ardent friends and supporters of the REA program thought possible fifteen years ago. And it is only because you have accomplished so much in so short a time -- more than 85 percent of our farms connected to power lines, and half of all electrified farms served by REA borrowers -- that the electric co-ops are now in the unique position of making a contribution to agriculture and to the Nation which is more far-reaching than anything the fathers of the REA movement envisioned. By making full use of that opportunity, you co-op leaders will not only strengthen your co-ops and benefit your own members, but you will also repay in part the confidence and support which the Nation has so generously given the REA program over the years.

As you know, our farmers have been asked to boost crop production to a level greater than any previously attained in the history of our Nation. Production goals for 1951 are 45 percent above the pre-World War II level and nearly 5 percent above those for 1950. But even if these goals are reached, we still will not have produced in sufficient quantity to fill the requirements for a number of important commodities. We need more cotton, corn, wheat, rice and processed vegetables. Our livestock

feeding program will eat heavily into our reserves of feed grains. The present food and feed situation indicates that reserves at the end of the 1951-52 crop year will be far below the minimum safe levels for the present emergency situation. Only by setting and meeting higher production records each year as long as the emergency continues can agriculture make its full contribution to the Nation's defense mobilization efforts.

But as you also know, there were a million and a quarter fewer workers on our farms in 1950 than in 1940. And our farm manpower supply is still dwindling. This means that farmers are called upon not only to produce more but to do so with less help. And that requires a maximum of farm mechanization and a constant further improvement in farm management practices.

The efficient use of electric power is one of the most important single factors that will enable farmers to produce more with less manpower. As you know, one kwh can do many farm chores which would take a man 8 hours or more to do by hand. On many farms which are not fully geared to electricity, at least half of the time and energy of the labor force has to be put into doing chores around the farmstead which could be done more quickly and more cheaply with electricity. By cutting the time needed for farmstead chores, electricity frees the available farm labor for other farm production tasks. Moreover, electricity contributes directly to increasing the quantity and improving the quality of many farm products such as milk, poultry products, hay, livestock.

The constant increase of kwh consumption on the farms of your co-op members shows that they are learning more and more to put electricity to productive use. But while some farmers have geared their entire operations to electric light, heat and power, most farmers are still far from utilizing electricity to their own best advantage. That is why the rural electric co-ops need to put increased emphasis on the productive and labor-saving uses of electricity on the farm.

While much electrical equipment needed on the farm is not yet in short supply, the demands on scarce material and skilled manpower for other defense needs are bound to place a limit on future equipment manufacture. It is therefore essential that farmers be given information and assistance that will help them use and maintain their equipment so as to get the best and longest possible service out of it. This is another task the rural electric co-ops cannot afford to neglect.

The outcome of the present world struggle between our democratic way of life and the totalitarian forces of Communism will depend in large measure, as I said earlier, on our developing our productive capacity to the fullest degree possible. That is why it seems to me most important that the rural electric co-ops do everything possible now to build up the production capacity of rural areas by pushing the area coverage job vigorously and by making sure that their lines will be fit to carry the strain of whatever loads the increasing demands of farms and rural

industries may require. This means not only heavying-up of lines but also good system maintenance and management. Also, it is of utmost importance that the electric co-op leadership make sure of a power supply adequate to meet these ever growing demands.

We must not forget that the normal growth of demand in industry and in urban areas and the added demand for stepped-up defense production in other fields than agriculture are going to be a tremendous drain on existing power generation and transmission capacity, especially of the commercial power companies. The fact that a rural electric co-op is currently able to buy all of the power its members require does not necessarily mean that it will have assurance of an adequate power supply for the years ahead.

Finally, I should like to remind the co-op leadership of the opportunity the rural electric co-ops have to serve their local communities and the Nation by making their technical and communications facilities and know-how available to the local civil defense authorities and organizations.

In many rural areas the electric co-op can reach more people with pertinent information in less time and with less effort than any other organized group. It has a staff trained in safety and first aid. It has trucks, buildings, radio equipment and other facilities helpful in emergency situations that might arise. Local civil defense authorities will appreciate an inventory of such facilities and a genuine offer of assistance. Also, electric co-op leaders would do well to take an active part on local committees concerned with our defense mobilization effort and to encourage the co-op membership to do likewise.

It seems to me especially important that the electric co-op keep in close touch with the county agricultural mobilization committees in its area and, if at all possible, arrange to have on each of these committees a representative who fully understands the co-op's problems and needs and can present them effectively. As all REA borrowers were advised recently, Secretary Brannen has recommended to the chairmen of the State Agricultural Mobilization Committees that they urge the chairmen of the County Committees to invite rural electric co-op representation on their County Committees.

Of course, much of the co-op's effectiveness as a constructive and influential community force will depend on how effectively and harmoniously the co-op itself functions as a democratic institution. To gain community acceptance, a co-op must be sure that its own house is in order, that its own members are well informed on co-op affairs and problems, and that they fully understand the advantages of co-op ownership and operation of their electric service enterprise. What they think and say about their co-op in their daily contacts with businessmen and other people in the community will do more than anything else in determining the co-op's place in the community.

To sum up, I should like to urge all electric co-op officials and leaders to do everything possible to:

1. Help farmers harness electricity right now for maximum food and fiber production.
2. Extend lines to unserved farms so that they too can tool up for efficient production.
3. Make sure of adequate system maintenance to provide dependable service.
4. Make sure of an adequate power supply not only now but for the years ahead.
5. Enroll in the community mobilization activities.

Co-op officials have this challenge before them. The Nation expects them to carry it out. This is indicated by the fact that CRITICAL MATERIAL IS BEING ALLOCATED TO THEM TO STEP UP ESSENTIAL FARM PRODUCTION. Whether the Nation can continue to give this priority to rural electrification depends in great measure upon the job the co-ops themselves do.

I feel very deeply the things I have discussed in this co-op chat, and I hope that you will take the time to think about them and, if you agree with me, to see to it that your co-op takes appropriate action.

Sincerely,

Claude R. Wickard

Administrator